

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00  
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01  
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EUR-12 IO-13 EB-08 COME-00  
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R 092000Z MAR 78  
FM AMEMBASSY SUVA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7142  
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA  
AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY  
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON  
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SUVA 0390

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, GN, XP  
SUBJECT: SITUATION IN HTHE GILBERTS

1. THE GILBERT ISLANDS, NOW AN INTERNALLY SELF-GOVERNING DEPENDENCY OF GREAT BRITIAN UNDER A COLONIAL GOVERNOR AND ELECTED CHIEF MINISTER, IS STEADILY MOVING TOWARD INDEPENDENCE , PROBABLY IN 1979. INDEPENDENCE WOULD HAVE COME IN 1978, WERE IT NOT FOR THE NEED PERCEIVED BY LONDON TO FIRST RESOLVE THE THORNY PROBLEM OF BANABAN CLAIMS TO OCEAN ISLAND, WHICH THE GILBERTESE CONSIDER THEIRS.

2. DURING MY RECENT TRIP TO SURVEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE GILBERTS, CAMPAIGNING WAS UNDERWAY TO CHOOSE A NEW CHIEF MINISTER. IT BECAME CLEAR BEFORE I LEFT THAT THE INCUMBENT, NABOUA RATIETA, WOULD NOT BE AMONG THOSE ON THE BALLOT ALTHOUGH HE NOMINATED HIMSELF TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY AS A CANDIDATE. UNDER SYSTEM, HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY RAN-ORDERS HOPEFULS TO CHOOSE NOT LESS THAN  
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THREE, NOR MORE THAN FIVE CANDIDATES. RATIETA FAILED IN FIELD OF FIVE. IT IS APPARENTLY NO LOSS SINCE HE CHARACTERIZED AS "BONE FIDE" AND ABSENT WHEN NEEDED. HE ALSO WAS PROBABLY VICTIM OF CULTURAL ATTITUDES WHICH RESENT ELEVATION OF INDIVIDUALS AMONG THE MASS, ALTHOUGH HE MAY RECEIVE PORTFOLIO IN NEW CABINET. TWICE WOULD BE TOO MUCH.

3. FRONT RUNNERS ARE RONITI TEIWAKI, MIN. FOR FINANCE, BABERA KIRATA, WHO IS ENDEAVORING FORM NATIONAL PARTY TO DECLARE IMMEDIATE INDEPENDENCE; TOMAS IUTA, ONE OF HANDFUL GILBERTESE BUSINESSMEN; IERIMA KABIA, LEADER OF OPPOSITION. ALTHOUGH SELECTPOCLYTML BE COMPLICATED BY NORTH GILBERTS-SOUTH GILBERTS, AND CATHOLIC VS. PROTESTANTS RIVALRIES, KABIA AND TEVIVAKI CONSIDERED STRONGEST CONTENDERS, WITH LATTER HAVING EDGE, IN MARCH 17 ISLAND-WIDE ELECTIONS FOR CHIEF MIN. IERIMIA HIGHLY RESPECTED AS LEADER OF OPPOSITION, TEIWAKI IS POPULAR, BRAINY, PERSONABLE BUT QUITE YOUNG.

4. PASSIONS OVER THE BANABAN ISSUE HAVE CLAIMED A VICTIM, JOHN SMITH, THE TALENTED BRITISH GOVERNOR. HE HAS PRESSED TOO HARD, APPARENTLY, FOR A RAPID, CLEAN SOLUTION WHICH WOULD PROVIDE INDEPENDENCE THIS YEAR TO THE RESTIVE GILBERTESE, AMONG WHOM THERE IS CONSIDERABLE RESENTMENT AT HAVING THEIR POLITICAL EVOLUTION SLOWED BY DELIBERATIONS OVER REAL ESTATE THEY CONSIDER THEIR OWN BY PROXIMITY, FAMILY TIES, AND HISTROIC RIGHTS. SMITH, WHO IS LEAVING EARLIER THAN EXPECTED WITH NO PROSPECTS OF ANOTHER APPOINTMENT, IS BITING IN HIS COMMENTS ON WHAT HE SEES AS UK INERTIA AND DITHERING OVER THE BANABAN QUESTION, ESPECIALLY SINCE HMG MADE COMMITMENT THAT ISSUE WOULD NOT DELAY INDEPENDENCE.

5. AS MATTERS NOW STAND, BANABANS IN FIJI, WERE MOST LIVE, ARE CONSIDERING U.K. REPLY TO RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED LAST YEAR  
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BY BANABANS AND GILBERTESE MEETING IN AIRIKI AT TARAWA, CAPITOL ATOLL OF THE GILBERTS. ONE OF THESE CALLED FOR A REFERENDUM ON OCEAN ISLAND OWNERSHIP WHICH MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE WOULD FAVOR ADHERENCE OF LONE OCEANIC SPECK TO GILBERTS. EMBASSY IS FORWARDING COPIES OF THE RESOLUTION AND RESPONSE.

6. UNLIKE TUVALU, THE GILBERTS WITH 50,000 PEOPLE HAS SOME SLIGHT PROSPECT OF MAKING ENDS MEET WITHOUT PERPETUAL FOREIGN AID. ITS SPICK AND SPAN MARINE TRAINING SCHOOL GRADUATES ABOUT 210 DECK, ENGINEER, AND CATERING SAILORS EACH YEAR WHO REMIT OVER A\$1 MILLION ANNUALLY. THIS IS THE BIGGEST SOURCE OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE AFTER OCEAN ISLAND PHOSPHATE RECEIPTS. (COPRA IS A POOR THIRD.) SOME 800 GILBERTESE AND 300 TUVALUAN SEAMEN PRESENTLY SERVE ON FOREIGN VESSELS. PLACES ARE MUCH SOUGHT AFTER, THE CLASSROOM WORK AND DISCIPLINE CHALLENGING, AND ABOUT 20 PERCENT DROP OUT.

7. FARMING OF BAIT FISH FOR SALE TO JAPANESE TUNA BOATS IS ALSO SHOWING PROMISE. THE FISH, MULLET AND MILKFISH, HAVE PROVEN ACCEPTABLE IN TESTS ABOARD A JAPANESE RESEARCH VESSEL. THEY ARE FARMED IN LONG PONDS DREDGED ON TARAWA.

8. THORISM IS VERY MUCH IN ITS INFANCY BUT A FEW WAYFARERS ARE TRICKLING THROUGH, PRINCIPALLY AMERICANS VISITING THE HAUTING BATTLE AREAS ON BETIO WHERE RUSTING COASTAL GUNS AND JAPANESE BUNKERS REMIND ONE OF OUR COSTLIEST AMPHIBIOUS ACTION. THE GILBERTS ARE ANXIOUS TO OBTAIN LANDING RIGHTS IN HONOLULU SO THAT TARAWA, CANTON, CHRISTMAS ISLANDS CAN BE REGULARLY SERVICED FROM THE U.S. ON A ROUTE THAT MIGHT APPEAL TO VISITORS.

9. OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL PLANS AND HOPES INVOLVE A BRINE SHRIMP PROJECT ON CHRISTMAS ISLAND, ESTABLISHMENT OF A FISHING CAMP FOR HONOLULU SPORTSMEN, AND AN AGREEMENT UNDER REVIEW WITH MINEX, A U.S. COMPANY INTERESTED IN EXPLORING FOR MINERALS, INCLUDING MANGANESE NODULES AND PHOSPHATE. FOREIGN AID NOW RUNS CONFIDENTIAL

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AT A\$1.5, NZ\$0.5, AND STERLING 2.0 MILLION PER YEAR.

10. ONLY U.S. - GILBERTS BILATERAL ISSUE INVOLVES OUR CLAIMS TO DISPUTED ISLANDS IN PHOENIX AND LINE GROUPS. NEGOTIATION ON THE QUESTION HAS BEEN BETWEEN LONDON AND WASHINGTON, AND EMBASSY SUVA HAS NOT BEEN DRAWN INTO THE PROCESS. WE HOPE THAT RESOLUTION IS ACHIEVED MORE AMICABLY THAN IN STICKY OCEAN ISLAND CASE.  
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## Message Attributes

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